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Soviet Special Forces Harass Swedes

Not since "The Man in the Iron Mask" has there been such a bizarre plot: abduction of the Swedish royal family by Soviet commandos to assure Sweden's neutrality in case of an East-West war.

The kidnap plot is revealed in a recent, highly sensitive U.S. intelligence report on the Spetsnaz, as the Soviet special forces are called. The purpose of seizing the royal family, the report explains, would be to sow confusion in Sweden and stifle any notion its political leaders might have of joining NATO countries against the Soviet Union.

For their own mysterious reasons, the Soviets have targeted Sweden for a wide range of harassment, espionage and apparent training missions for the Spetsnaz. Their arrogance is sometimes unbelievable. Two years ago, the Swedish army had to use machine guns and grenades to repel Soviet frogmen who had landed on the island of Almoe, near the Swedes' Karlskrona naval base.

Over the last five years, in fact, Sweden has been "invaded" more than 100 times by Spetsnaz mini-submarines—code-named Argus (the manned version) and Zbuk (the remote-controlled drone). These 65-foot mini-subs are launched from a mother submarine and can crawl along the seabed on their tanklike tracks or skim through the water by propeller. They have a maximum operating depth of 344 feet.

The mini-subs are used by the four Spetsnaz naval brigades, which report to the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence organization.

"GRU naval Spetsnaz concentrates on attacking

enemy seaborne nuclear delivery systems or support facilities," a secret Pentagon report explains. "They can be used to attack shoreline targets or can be used against interior targets when sea infiltration is preferred." In fact, the mini-subs have already made it into Stockholm harbor to within a mile of the royal palace.

The Pentagon report also notes: "Both ground [forces] and [the 2,000 men of] naval Spetsnaz can [infiltrate] . . . various vessels, including merchant ships, high-speed craft or submarines. Mini-submersibles launched from either subs or surface craft can be used either to infiltrate teams or to conduct an underwater attack against ships, shoreline or underwater targets."

In Sweden's case, the mini-subs are undoubtedly conducting reconnaissance and training activities. Their frequent and flagrant intrusions have been understandably demoralizing to the Swedish navy. One naval officer, Capt. Hans von Hofsten, has publicly complained, "Defense policy has too long been based on ignoring the facts. The extent, intensity and seriousness of the submarine operations in our waters are passed over in silence, belittled or even ridiculed [by civilian leaders]."

Meanwhile, the Spetsnaz mini-subs' distinctive tracks have been showing up in strategic locations all over the world. Tracks identical to those left on the Swedish seabed have been found off Gibraltar and near Japanese naval bases. Some were detected in the Soya Strait between the Japanese northern island of Hokkaido and Soviet Sakhalin Island, the route Soviet warships take to reach the Pacific from Vladivostok.